The Lost Journal Of Jacob

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Mary, a history student at the academy, worked part-time at the research library. She had been working all summer sorting documents in the cellar of the library. At least it was cool down there, but it was dirty. The head librarian wanted all the old newspapers gathered and sorted. As Mary headed down the dimly lit stairs the musty smell of the library's cellar assaulted her. Mary wondered if the papers would be damaged by the dampness.

Mary had been working for a couple of hours. She had gone through three stacks of papers, some dating back to the 1700's. Mary had stacked them neatly and by date in boxes to go upstairs to the head librarian's office. She would have to get the janitor to bring them up; the boxes were much too heavy for her to lift. While she was working on the fourth stack she came across what looked like a book. Mary brought it closer to the light. Across the front cover was written *Jacob's Journal*. Mary had no idea how this had gotten there. She thought she should bring it to the immediate attention of the head librarian, but did not. Instead, she sat on the stool close to the light and began to read.

Jacob's Journal Entries

August 1792

We left Salem, Massachusetts two weeks ago. Our destination; Sumatra. I was lucky enough to gain a berth on a Derby East Indiamen ship. I was born in Salem and I have spent most of my life (I am twenty-two at the time of this writing) on the water. I have been employed as a fisherman or a dock worker since I can remember. Since I was a boy I have heard tales of Derby ships going to sea and the wonders the sailors have seen. The exotic places Derby ships have traveled and the people the sailors have encountered have always drawn me to the docks and the sea. A man can get a taste of

these exotic places just sitting on Derby Warf and listening to the sailors' talk of their exploits aboard ship. Everyone in Salem knows of the name and the story of Captain Jonathan Haraden, who, with a letter of marque, captured the Golden Eagle and the Achilles in 1780. Both English ships were bigger and better manned; Haraden had forty-five men and boys aboard his General Pickering compared to the Achilles at one hundred thirty.[1]

We will make port in other places to trade some of our cargo for fresh supplies (fresh fruit and vegetables, water and meats). We have a cargo of sugar in the hold to trade for pepper (a highly prized spice in Salem) in Sumatra. The crew of this ship is a diverse group. Most are Americans, some from as far away as Boston and New York. There is also an Irishman and a Scotsman. Three of us are natives from Salem and all three of us have experience on boats. The two who are from Boston have never been to sea and are experiencing seasickness. We also have an old Tar, John, on board and those of us who are green-hands take notice when he talks.

I am trying to learn my duties as a Jack Tar. Being on a fishing boat that goes out to sea for only a couple of days is not the same as going to sea on a merchant ship. One difference is of course the amount of crew. There are about twenty men on board. Another difference is the watches. Even in a safe port watch is posted. Time is divided by watches, "being on duty and off duty", or, as it is called, on deck and below, every other four hours. The three night watches are called the first, the middle, and the morning watch."[2]

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[1]Clifford Lindsey Alderman, Illustrated by Albert Michini, *The Privateersmen* (Philadelphia and New York: Chilton Books, 1965), 43-51.

[2] Richard Henry Dana Jr., *Two Years Before The Mast A Personal Narrative* (New York, New York: Signet Classic Penguin Group, 1964), 18.

September 1792

It is very hard to be a green-hand aboard ship. The men do not have much faith in your ability to carry out orders. But, I am learning and learning fast. If you don't it could cost you your life or the life of a mate. I will try to keep this journal regular while at sea, but my free time is limited and when I do have it I try to sleep. Sleep is one of the things that is in very short supply aboard ship. No sooner do I lay my head in my hammock than I am called forth for some duty or another. Here would be a good place to describe the sleeping quarters of a seamen or Jack Tar, which is what I am called. On a merchant ship as much space as possible is filled with cargo or ballast. Seamen are packed as tightly as possible in the forward part of the hold. This is called the steerage. Officers of the highest order have their own cabins and do not share the cramped living quarters of the common seamen. My hammock is made of a sturdy canvas three feet by six feet; this is hung lengthwise under the deck. There is only a few inches separating my hammock from the next and few feet separating my head and the deck above. The rocking of the ship is the lullaby of the common seamen, who falls fast asleep once in his hammock.[3]

I have used the term "Jack Tar" in referring to myself and my fellow crew members. A brief description of the term is in order. The common sailor is called a Jack Tar. The name is really a description of their clothing. The clothing of the sailor must be made waterproof and sturdy as there is no guarantee as to when the clothing will be replaced. In order to waterproof the clothing of the sailor tar or pine pitch is applied to

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[3] Marcus Rediker, *Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, And The Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700—1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1987), 160.

the clothing. All clothing from hats to trousers was treated in this manner.[4] *Hats are black flat brimmed; the trousers are tight fitting in the hips and have a bell bottom so they are easy to roll up while scrubbing the decks or wading ashore. A neckerchief, usually black to hide dirt, is worn around the neck or around the head. A close fitted checked shirt is usually worn by most Jack Tars.*[5]

I have found that loneliness and hard work are the constant companions of the common seamen. The feeling of being separated from loved ones is continually on the mind of every man aboard who is not at some task or other. Loneliness seems to strike most often at sunrise when all is in that twilight state.[6] *The men talk of their families, wives, children, friends, and sweethearts left behind. It is a sad thing to see a rough hewn sailor turn misty-eyed when talking of those left behind. All who listen know the feelings of the speaker. All understand the sense of longing to look upon the cherished faces of those loved ones. And all know that our choice of being at sea may be our last. We all know that our choice of leaving loved ones behind may be the last time we see those loved ones. Disaster can and does strike at any moment and can come in many forms. The least of which is the sea, which holds no mercy for those who trespass across its waters. Disease, accidents, and pirates are other disasters which can take away the life of a seaman as quickly as I write these words.*[7]

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[4]C. Keith Wilbur, *Picture Book of the Revolution's Privateers* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1973), 31-32.

[5]C. Keith Wilbur, *Picture Book of the Revolution's Privateers* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1973), 32; Richard Henry Dana Jr., *Two Years Before The Mast: A Personal Narrative* (New York, New York: Signet Classic Penguin Group, 1964), 9.

[6] Richard Henry Dana Jr., *Two Years Before The Mast A Personal Narrative* (New York, New York: Signet Classic Penguin Group, 1964), 14.

[7] Marcus Rediker, *Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, And The Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700—1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 159.

I am glad that I had spent time working on fishing boats in my youth before making the decision of going to sea as a Jack Tar. I am a green-hand on a merchant ship but I have my "sea-legs". There are some of my fellow mates who had never set foot on a boat before this trip. They suffer greatly from seasickness. Seasickness can and does lay a man so low that they wish for death. It is a most debilitating sickness of both the body and mind. Work on a merchant ship does not stop because some of the crew is sick; neither can a crewman find someone to take his place at an assigned task. Jack Tar must work though he be sick or in perfect health. The sea and the ship are the hardest task-masters of all.[8]

September 1792

It has been four days since I last wrote in my journal. I have not had the time as we have suffered through a gale. The experience has made an extreme impression upon me. I have seen storms on land and have even experienced what I thought were big storms while out fishing, but nothing compares to a storm at sea. A storm at sea makes a man realize the fragility of a ship and the lives that ship holds. Here I will describe the storm as best I can. I cannot tell when the storm started as I was in my hammock fast asleep when the ship took a wave that nearly pitched me to the deck. (This is the worst way a seaman can be awakened.) As I set my feet on the deck the order was heard "All hands Ahoy!" The deck was a nightmare of water and sound. The wind howled through the shrouds like the Devil's own wolves. And the lightening slashed a wicked scar across the sky followed by thunder that made a man think the sky was falling into the sea around

[8] Richard Henry Dana Jr., *Two Years Before The Mast A Personal Narrative* (New York, New York: Signet Classic Penguin Group, 1964), 13-14.

him. I could see the officers giving orders but could not hear what the orders were until the officer yelled directly into my ear. One of the more experienced men took me by the hand and gave me a six foot piece of rope. At first I didn't understand what I was supposed to do with the rope. Then I saw him tying the rope to the rail and sliding it along as he moved. It was then I realized for the first time that I could be washed over board in the storm.[9]

For the next three days, while the storm raged against the ship, I stayed lashed to anything solid I could get my six foot tether around and still perform my duties. The worst was climbing into the rigging to help take in sail. This is not the place any man wants to be in a storm. With the winds threatening to tear you from the rigging and smashing you on the deck below or tossing your slight form like a sacrifice into the thrashing sea below. But there is nothing Jack Tar can do but follow orders as quickly as possible. I was especially glad to put my feet back on the relative terra firma of the deck when a huge wall of water hit the ship and nearly turned her on her beam. Ned (one of my fellow Jacks) had been standing next to me, and neither of us had had a chance to tether ourselves to the rail for the long walk to the hatch. When the ship righted herself, Ned was no where to be found. We had both been thrown against the far side of the ship. I grabbed a hold of a rope that was tied to something (I am still not sure what) as I skidded my way across the deck. Ned was not so fortunate. He was washed overboard, never to be seen or heard from again.[10]

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[9]Richard Henry Dana Jr., *Two Years Before The Mast A Personal Narrative* (New York, New York: Signet Classic Penguin Group, 1964); Marcus Rediker, *Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, And The Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700—1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[10]Richard Henry Dana Jr., *Two Years Before The Mast A Personal Narrative* (New York, New York: Signet Classic Penguin Group, 1964); Sebastian Junger, *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against The Sea* (New York, N.Y.: Harper Collins, 1998).

The storm brought the loss of another one of my fellow Jacks. Thomas was hit in the head by a spar that had come loose during the storm. The Surgeon did all that he could for him but the injury was too great and he died last night of his injury. He was buried at sea at first light today. I have never been a witness to this kind of ritual at sea and it struck me as one of the saddest experiences of all. The man was sewn into an old blanket with weights attached to his feet. A few words were said of the man and a few prayers were said, then the body was heaved overboard into the now calm sea. There is no marker to tell where Thomas or Ned are buried, no church ceremony, no bells ringing, and no family mourning. Did these men have family at home waiting upon their return? Did they have children who will miss their fathers? Will there be the weeping of parents? I don't know the answers to these questions, but in case the same thing should happen to me I have made a list of people who should be notified and left it sealed in the bottom of my sea chest. In this way my parents will know of my last wishes and that I died on these wild seas.[11]

September 1792

Today, being Sunday and a day of relative ease aboard ship, we held an auction of the dead men's things. This is the custom of all seafaring men. Their sea chests and bedding were brought to the mainmast. The chests were opened and the auction began. To others this may seem a barbaric ritual, but to those of us who understand this was a way for us to honor their memory. All crew including the officers gathered at the mainmast for the auction. Their clothes, bedding, a book, and other personal belongings

[11] Marcus Rediker, *Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, And The Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700—1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 196.

were sold at an extremely high rate. The money will be sent, once we dock in Salem, to their families. In this way we poor Jack Tars honor our dead who now sleep at the bottom of the ocean in the middle of nowhere.[12]

After the auction we had a meal fit for the best houses of Salem. The Captain, knowing the state of mind of his crew and being a good and fair Captain, ordered several of the chickens killed. There is a small chicken coop on deck where they are kept. When we left Salem there were forty chickens, hens and roosters. This allowed the crew to have fresh eggs and occasionally a feast of roasted chickens. The cook prepared them as best he could as he had only little spice in his galley. To supplement the chicken there was fish aplenty, which some of the crew had spent their afternoon catching. The different kinds of fish I can not tell as many I have never seen before. I have been told by the other more experienced men that when we pass the equator the real treat will be sea turtle; I have my doubts, but will write of the experience.[13] *The vegetables were used sparingly. This is not unusual on a long voyage. Fruit and vegetables must be kept as long as possible and used sparingly to stave off scurvy. After we had all eaten our fill, we toasted (with an extra ration of grog) the two men who had died in the storm. This will be the last mention of them as they are now truly gone.*

On the morrow, it being Monday, it will be back to work. That is to say the usual work of Jack Tar. Sundays on board this ship, the Captain allows for light duty on the part of his crew. This allows the men a chance to read, write letters, get a little extra

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[12] Marcus Rediker, *Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, And The Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700—1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 197.

[13] Marcus Rediker, *Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, And The Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700—1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 128.

sleep, repair their own clothing, or have a game of cards. If a man feels like he has had some time off from his regular duties he can approach them with a better mindset on the next day. Ship duties, for the most part, are very mundane. There is always work to be done, such as overhauling rigging, coiling ropes, repairing and oiling gear, changing and mending sail canvas, tarring ropes, general cleaning, making sure all gear is properly stowed, painting, swabbing and holystoning the decks, and checking the cargo.[14] *The stowing of gear and the checking of the cargo is a constant process, because the ship is in constant motion and the constant threat of storms, gear and cargo can come loose and cause damage to the ship or a crewmember.*

October 1792

We are two days out from the West Indies. Many of us had letters to be sent home almost certain we would find a Salem ship in port. We were not disappointed and the crew of the other Derby ship was happy to take our letters for us, as they were bound for Salem on the same tide. It was surprising to some to find Salemites in such a distant land, but for those of us that grew up in Salem with the stories of our captains sailing the world over, we expected to find at least one ship belonging to our home waters. I am sure we will find Salem ships wherever we dock.[15]

It occurred to me that the sights, sounds and smells of the wharfs of the West Indies are almost the same as Salem, but not quite. Meeting men from America and Salem made it feel a little more like home, but not home. Are all ports the same all over

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[14] Marcus Rediker, *Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, And The Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700—1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 95.

[15] Dane Anthony Morrison And Nancy Lusignan Schultz, *Salem Place, Myth, and Memory* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 107-127.

the world? Do they all have the same look, feel, smells, and people? Was it just one certain smell, sight, or person that made it seem like home? Or was the port of the West Indies the closest we will come to our home port because we trade with them so often? I don't know yet, but will find out as we dock in each port. I will compare each port with ours at home.[16]

Home. It seems so long ago since I have seen those distant shores when in reality it has only been two months that we have been at sea. So much has happened and there is so much left to come as we are only a little way into our voyage. It was a great pleasure to hear news of home, not just from America but from Salem.

October 1792

During the morning watch we crossed the equator. Those of us who have never been to this part of the world were put through the ritual of "crossing the line." A sailor can evade this ritual by paying a bottle of brandy or a pound of sugar. None of us paid. A rope was run up to the yard arm from the quarter deck with a stick attached to it. When all was in readiness the stick is lowered to the quarter deck I sat on the stick holding tight to the rope. I was then hoisted up to the yard arm the crew let go of the rope and I was plunged into the sea at an astonishing rate as far down as the keel. This was repeated two more times. The flight to the sea is breathtaking. After all the green hands had gone

[16] Dane Anthony Morrison And Nancy Lusignan Schultz, *Salem Place, Myth, and Memory* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 107-127.

through the ritual there was drinking and dancing. We are no longer considered green hands; we are truly part of the crew now, true Sailors.[17]

I have first watch this night and must be on my toes. The Old Tar has said we are in for a blow soon. He said he could feel it in his bones. The whole crew, including the Captain, listens to the Old Tar's bones. They haven't been wrong yet.

Mary gently turned the pages of the journal only to find the rest of them blank. What had happened? Why did he stop writing? Did the ship make it to Sumatra? Did they make a good trade? Someone had brought the journal back, but who? Was it Jacob or someone else? Did the journal come home on the same ship that Jacob was on or was it on another? And if it was another ship what happened to Jacob's ship and the crew? What was the name of Jacob's ship? He never mentions the name in the journal.

Mary spent the next two weeks going through the documents in the cellar of the library. She scanned through newspaper articles that mentioned all ships coming into port trying to find out what happened to Jacob. At last, frustrated, Mary asked the head librarian if she had ever seen the journal. The head librarian said no, but told Mary she was welcome to research her finding.

Mary spent the rest of the summer trying to find out what happened to Jacob. She read every log and journal she could find in the library. There were several Jacob's in the lists of crew members, but which one was her Jacob? Her only clues were the deaths of

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[17]Marcus Rediker, *Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, And The Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700—1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 186-187.

the two men, Ned and Thomas, aboard Jacob's ship, and she never found any record of those men.

September rolled around and Mary had to give up her search. She was back in class full-time and still working part-time at the library. The library was always a busy place. With students and professors working on their studies it was difficult for Mary to do any side work. Maybe some day she would be able to find out what happened to Jacob. Or, maybe the story of Jacob, just a regular Jack Tar who sailed the oceans of the world, would remain a mystery for all time.

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